

**SITUATION REPORT NO. 7**  
**INCIDENT NO. 2003-028**  
**DATE: August 29, 2003 Time: 2:00 P.M.**

**TO:** Governor John Hoeven  
State Capitol  
Bismarck ND 58505

1. **NATURE OF DISASTER:** **Serious Fire Danger** – Lingering drought conditions prevail in portions of western and southwestern North Dakota. The combination of hot, dry and windy weather conditions, and explosive vegetation significantly increases the risk of catastrophic wildfires. Wildfires that start are likely to grow quickly and will be more intense and difficult to control, as well as more threatening to firefighters. The remainder of the fire season has the potential to be very active.
2. **DEATHS AND INJURIES:** No change from previous reports.
3. **DAMAGES:** State and local officials reported 56 fires on just over 6,700 acres of land for the month of August. The usual number of acres burned for the month is around 500. This is indicative of how critical conditions are at the current time. The conditions are conducive to fires starting easily and growing large very quickly. The overwhelming majority of these fire starts have been attributed to human actions. The criteria used to measure large fire potential remain near historical highs, according to the N.D. Forest Service and live fuel moistures remain dangerously low. Measures of cumulative fire danger still show extreme to very high, especially in the western third of the state.

The North Dakota Agricultural Statistics Service indicated for the week of August 18 – 24, 2003, above normal temperatures and minimal precipitation allowed farmers to make excellent progress harvesting small grains. Scattered rains were reported across much of the state, but more is needed. The high temperatures and low soil moisture supplies continue to stress late season and oilseed crops and pastures in most areas of the state. Average topsoil moisture supplies declined from adequate to surplus. Current topsoil moisture supply ratings were 31 percent very short, 45 short, 24 adequate and 0 surplus compared to 26 percent very short, 48 short, 26 adequate and 4 surplus previously.

Following is a list by county of fires that were reported to the State Emergency Operations Center (EOC):

#### Adams County:

On August 23, a fire, which started in the engine of a combine, started a stubble field on fire. High winds pushed the fire over stubble and prairie into an abandoned farmstead destroying the shelterbelt and all buildings on the farm site. A total of over 250 acres was burned.

Two fires, reported on August 18 burned approximately six acres of land in the central and eastern portions of the county. A third fire, which was started by farm equipment in the eastern portion of Adams County, burned ten acres.

#### Billings County:

On August 27, Billings County Rural Fire Department, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, N.D. State Forest Service and Theodore Roosevelt National Park responded to three grass fires. The first one was six miles north of Belfield and 13 miles west of U.S. Highway 85 at an area known as Franks Creek in the Little Missouri National Grasslands north of the Theodore Roosevelt National Park (South Unit). The first fire was reported to have been started by a lightning strike and burned approximately 250 acres. The second and third fires were south of Medora and were minimal in size and damage.

#### Burleigh County:

Twice on August 23, the Bismarck Rural Fire Department using mutual aid responded to a grass fire along Highway 83 at mile marker 108/Highway 1804 northwest. There were actually two fires at that location. Approximately 2,000 acres burned.

On August 22, the Bismarck Rural Fire Department responded to the report of a fire along Interstate 94 between mile markers 176 and 177. There was no fire upon their arrival at that location.

Bismarck Rural Fire Department responded to a grass fire at 53<sup>rd</sup> Street Southeast and 28<sup>th</sup> Avenue Southeast on August 21. The fire was approximately one-eighth of a mile wide.

#### Dunn County:

On August 29, the Dunn County Emergency Manager reported a grass fire along N.D. Highway 200 between Halliday and Dunn Center that had originally started on August 26. The Halliday Fire Department responded and put out the fire. On August 28, the fire reignited inside a coal vein. To extinguish the fire, the N.D. Department of Transportation provided a grader and Dunn County Highway Department provided a backhoe to dig a trench that was filled with water supplied by a contractor.

#### Foster County:

On August 23, the Carrington Fire Department responded to a fire on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land. The fire was located seven miles south and two miles west of Carrington. The fire burned 60 acres and threatened a house. During the initial attack it started to rain and this helped the firefighters insure that the fire never got close to the house. While the Carrington Fire Department was returning to the fire hall, a lightning strike approximately four to five miles southwest of the first fire started a hay bale on fire, which they responded to and extinguished.

#### Golden Valley County:

Two grass fires were reported in Golden Valley County on August 27. One fire was near Beach and the second fire was near Golva.

#### Kidder County

An August 18 fire, located seven miles north of the I-94 Robinson exit, burned 3,000 acres of pasture and hay land, a tree shelterbelt, 50 hay bales and an abandoned farmstead. Numerous fences had to be cut to allow cattle to escape the path of the fire. Twice that same day, firefighters were called out to the same area to handle flare-ups. No injuries were reported with any of these fires.

On August 17, eight miles north of Tappen firefighters were called to handle a 15 to 20 acre fire that erupted on CRP land from farm machinery. Later that same day, a combine started a second fire seven miles southeast of Tappen. The fire was contained within the combine.

On August 12, a grass fire started from a baler in a hay field adjacent to Interstate 94. Approximately 100 acres burned, including some large hay bales.

#### Logan County:

On August 24, Napoleon Fire Department responded to a fire on CRP land, nine miles west and one and one-half miles east of Napoleon. A total of 60 acres of land burned.

On August 18, a fire on CRP land burned 100 acres three miles southeast of Napoleon.

On August 17, firefighters responded to a CRP fire 3 miles north of Napoleon in which 75 acres burned.

The Napoleon Fire Department was called to two fires on CRP land on August 16. The first one was one mile east of Napoleon in which five acres burned and the second fire in which 30 acres burned was four miles east of Napoleon.

On August 11, 1,200 hay bales burned in a farmyard 12 miles southwest of Napoleon. Firefighters were able to save the barn. Additionally, 100 acres of CRP land and numerous hay bales burned three miles southeast of Napoleon. Firefighters saved the farmstead.

#### Mercer County:

Stanton Fire Department responded to a grass fire two miles west and five miles south of Stanton along N.D. Highway 31 on August 22.

Also on August 22, the Hazen and Beulah Fire Departments teamed up and extinguished a 10 to 15 acre grass fire approximately 11 miles south and three miles east of Beulah.

On August 20, juveniles using a garden hose stopped a fire that started in a garbage barrel and was headed towards a rural residence house. The Hazen Fire Department personnel conducted mop up operations.

The Hazen Fire Department responded to a fire, which started in a wheat field on August 19 two miles south of Hazen. The fire was brought under control in a very short time.

Morton County:

The Morton County Emergency Manager reported on August 28, that the Almont Fire Department responded to a grass fire. Southeast of Almont, that had started the previous day and had flared up again and was threatening unoccupied structures on a farmstead. One acre was reported as being burned and trees in the area were reported smoldering.

The Morton County Emergency Manager also reported that the Mandan Rural Fire Department and the Bismarck Rural Fire Department responded to a second grass fire, which originally had ignited on August 27 and flared up again on August 28. The location of this fire was seven miles south of I-94 at exit 140 on Morton County Road 83 and is on state owned land. Trees in the area, some up to 50 feet tall, are still smoldering but are being monitored by the Mandan Rural Fire Department.

On August 28, the Mandan Rural Fire Department and the Bismarck Rural Fire Department responded to a grass fire nine miles east of N.D. Highway 6 along Morton County Road 35. This fire burned 100 acres of land and firefighters were able to stop the fire before it could get to structures in the immediate area. Personnel mowing ditches caused the fire.

Also on August 28, the Mandan Rural Fire Department along with the Bismarck Rural Fire Department responded to a fire that was started in a garbage pit at a junkyard by a person using a cutting torch on metal. This fire was located north of I-94 exit 140 two miles, then two miles west along 36<sup>th</sup> street.

Morton County Emergency Management staff reported area citizens prior to the arrival of Mandan Rural Fire Department on August 28 extinguished a garbage fire near Huff.

On August 27, the Morton County Emergency Manager reported 11 separate grass fires. The first fire was located southeast of Almont and resulted in approximately 180 acres being burned. The second fire, 14 miles north of New Salem along N.D. Highway 31, resulted in minimal damage. The third fire, which was a single hay bale fire, was 14 miles north and three miles west of New Salem. The fourth fire was located one and one-half miles east of Almont and resulted in minimal damage. The fifth fire, located five miles west of Mandan, north of I-94 near mile marker 145 resulted in damage to approximately 20 acres. The sixth and seventh fires were reported to be within one-half mile of each other were located twelve miles southwest and one mile west of Mandan on Morton County Road 83. One fire burned five acres and the other burned 60 to 70 acres. The eighth fire, located six miles south and two miles west of Hebron on Morton County Road 90, resulted in damage to six hay bales. The ninth fire was 11 miles south of the N.D. Highway 21 and N.D. Highway 31 junction along N.D. Highway 31. The 10th fire was located 13 miles south of the N.D. Highway 21 and N.D. Highway 31 junction along N.D. Highway 31. Area residents prior to the arrival of responding fire units put out the fire. Less than one acre of land burned. The 11th fire, which burned 600 acres of land and 150 bales of hay, was located at 5375 27<sup>th</sup> Street.

On August 22, the Mandan Rural Fire Department along with the New Salem Fire Department responded to a fire northwest of Mandan. Location of the fire was six miles north of Interstate 94 along N.D. Highway 25, then three miles west on County Road 140. Approximately 350 to 400 acres burned.

A fire in a pile of trees branches and leaves erupted at the Mandan City Landfill on August 12. The fire started to spread to a pile of compost but was contained by the Mandan Rural and Mandan Fire Departments. Mandan Public Works helped contain the fire by using equipment to pile dirt on it.

#### Oliver County:

On August 27, the Oliver County Emergency Manager reported that the Oliver County Rural Fire Department along with four mutual aid fire departments responded to a grass fire four miles south and eight miles west of Center.

On August 21, the Oliver County Fire Department along with its mutual aid fire departments responded to a prairie fire six miles south of Center. Approximately 1,000 acres and 250 bales of hay burned.

#### Sioux County:

An estimated 2,000-acre fire in Sioux County on the South Dakota/North border made a four to five mile run in 45 minutes on August 13 before firefighters were able to contain it.

#### Slope County:

A grass fire in Slope County near Marmath on August 27 burned approximately 200 acres.

#### Wells County:

Hay bales burned on a farm seven miles south of Fessenden on August 23. The farmer contained the fire as he used a backhoe to push the burning bales away from other bales. The Fessenden Fire Department responded.

On August 22, the Fessenden Fire Department responded to a grass fire four miles east of Heimdahl, which was started from someone burning trash in a barrel. The wind caught bits of the burning pieces and blew them into the grass. The fire was contained and under control in less than an hour.

On August 20, a bearing overheated on a combine, starting six different small fires. There was no major damage to equipment or surrounding area. The fire was located seven miles west, three-quarters of a mile north and one-quarter mile east of Fessenden.

Also on August 20, a hay bale in a corral caught on fire six miles west, one-quarter mile north and one and one-quarter miles west of Fessenden. The fire burned a surrounding manure pile and was stopped three feet from the barn.

#### Williams County

On August 15, a 350 to 400 acre grass fire erupted 13 miles north and six miles west of Williston before firefighters were able to get it contained.

4. RESOURCES:

LOCAL: No change from previous reports.

STATE: No change from previous reports

FEDERAL: In addition to previous reports, the U.S. Park Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, have been providing firefighting resources.

5. VOLUNTEER ACTION: No change from previous report.

6. MAJOR ACTIONS: On the Franks Creek fire, which started in Billings County on August 27, a unified command system was established between Billings County Rural Fire Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Resources used to fight the fire included, 18 fire engines, two dozers, four water tenders, 10 overhead teams and 73 personnel. Agencies responding included: Billings County Rural Fire Department, Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Dakota Prairie Grasslands of the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, state and local law enforcement, emergency management and two contractors.

The N.D. Department of Transportation (NDDOT) staged a 6,000-gallon water tender in Dickinson. In addition, personnel in each NDDOT district throughout the state had been placed on alert to provide response capability.

On August 29, the Burleigh County Emergency Manager provided information on three firefighting incidents that the Bismarck Rural Fire Department responded to under mutual aid. Those were: The Morton County fire nine miles east of N.D. Highway 6 along Morton County Road 35 near St. Anthony, This fire was located north of I-94 exit 140 two miles, then two miles west along 36<sup>th</sup> Street and seven miles south of I-94 at exit 140 on Morton County Road 83 and is on state owned land.

National Weather Service personnel issued a forecast for Friday with temperatures around 70 degrees with winds from the northwest at 10 miles per hour (mph). Saturday call for temperatures from the middle to upper 70s with light winds of 10 to 15 mph and partly sunny skies. The Rural Fire Danger Index will be in the "High" category for Saturday and Sunday.

A morning briefing was conducted on August 28 in the State Emergency Operations Center with personnel from the N.D. Division of Emergency Management and N.D. Forest Service to discuss planning and response issues on the Frank's Creek Fire.

On August 13, the Billings County Commissioners issued a "Fire Emergency Order," which prohibited open burning, to include campfires, garbage or pit burning and brush field or ditch burning.

On August 29, Morton County officials issued an advisory cautioning people to be extremely careful in regard to all outdoor activity because of the volatile fuel conditions throughout the county.

7. ASSISTANCE NEEDED: No additional assistance has been requested.

8. OUTSIDE HELP ON SCENE: No additional outside help has been requested.
9. OTHER INFORMATION: The N.D. Division of Emergency Management's Situation Reports are posted on the Division's Internet home page. The address is <http://www.state.nd.us/dem>.

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Douglas C. Friez, State Director